DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 467 239 CE 083 601

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TITLE	Adult Learning in and through the Arts. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, OH.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-CE-02-236
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	4p.; Digest Number 236.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0013
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Center on Education and Training for Employment, College of Education, The Ohio State University, 1900 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1090. For full text: http://www.ericacve.org/pubs.asp.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Education; *Adult Learning; *Aesthetic Education; Art; Art Activities; *Art Education; Art Expression; Creative Activities; Critical Thinking; Cultural Enrichment; Dance; *Educational Objectives; *Educational Objectives; Empowerment; Music; *Student Evaluation; Transformative Learning
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Multiple, sometimes competing, purposes for adult arts education are to develop the individual, maintain the dominant culture, or change the culture; develop appreciative audiences or creative practitioners; or liberate creativity or develop technical skills. Art may be the means or a goal in itself; that is, the arts may be used for instrumental purposes such as critical thinking, literacy, therapy, or other outcomes often used to justify arts education, or arts learning may have intrinsic value. These multiple purposes raise certain issues for providers. First, what counts as art and who decides? Based on varying definitions of the arts, a second issue is what are the goals of adult arts education? A third issue is how learning in the arts should be assessed. Community arts is an approach that illustrates these issues. Community arts are focused on the production of art as the expression of community culture, not as a commodity. Adults may find a rich source of meaningful learning opportunities in and through the arts. Education in the arts includes activities whose primary purpose is to encourage people to engage with the arts as creators, participants, or appreciators. Education through the arts involves activities that use the arts to achieve ends that are tangential to the arts, developing new ways of seeing, knowing, and experiencing. (Contains 19 references.) (YLB)

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ED 467 239

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ERIC Digest No. 236

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ERIC Digest no. 236

Adult Learning in and through the Arts

by Sandra Kerka

2002
EDO-CE-02-236

It has become increasingly clear that millions of contemporary adults...have grown up with little or no grounding in the arts, and do not even consider participating in an artistic discipline or attending an arts event when choosing among their leisure and entertainment options (McDaniel and Thorn 1997, p. 6). The focus of much contemporary research and policy in arts education is on the K-12 level. However, arts learning experiences also benefit adults. Lifelong learning in the arts is a broad subject that may be viewed from many perspectives. This *Digest* discusses adult learning in the arts and addresses current issues in adult arts education.

Adult Arts Learning: Some Examples

The motivations and objectives of both providers and participants in adult arts learning are diverse. Adult educators seeking to foster transformative learning invoke the role of imagination in developing new perspectives; they view the arts as a way of engaging adults in imaginative exploration of themselves and their relationship to the world (Dirkx 2000; Kazemek and Rigg 1997). In adult literacy education, analysis of paintings and poems can be a means of developing visual and linguistic acuity, critical thinking, and aesthetic judgment (Dreybus 2000; Kazemek and Rigg 1997). Greene (in Elias, Jones, and Normie 1995) speaks of aesthetic education as a form of critical literacy to empower people to read and name their world.

For prison inmates, the arts can be a route to reconnecting with learning, developing interpersonal and reasoning skills, and exploring different value systems. For example, drama workshops in a prison literacy program draw on learners' experiences, involving them in role playing to reinforce literacy practices and helping them reinterpret their experiences metaphorically (Kett 2001). Another approach to the arts as experiential learning is the Duke University business school's Leadership and the Arts course (Alburty 1999). The program equates leaders and artists in that both know how to coach, encourage, take risks, innovate, inspire, and express a vision; both use the capacities of emotional observation and critical judgment.

Intergenerational arts projects foster the development of communication and reflection skills and formation of new perspectives about oneself and others. Apol and Kambour (1999) used dance and writing with elders and adolescents to engage both verbal and nonverbal ways of knowing and help them express "the complex physical, social, and psychological issues in their lives" (p. 107). Such therapeutic benefits of creative activity are often an important motivation for arts participation. In Bardsley and Soskice's (1998) survey, one-third of adult arts learners sought job-related skills, but the majority were motivated by increased confidence, maintenance of physical and mental abilities, and recovery from loss or illness. Similarly, in a music appreciation course, two-thirds of adult participants cited therapeutic motivations such as coping with stress (Buell in Jones, McConnell, and Normie 1996).

These examples involve different providers: adult educators (Dirkx, Dreybus, Kazemek and Rigg), artists/arts educators working with adults (Apol and Kambour, Buell), and educators using the arts in other subject areas (Alburty). In addition, a great deal of adult arts learning takes place formally and informally in museums, parks, galleries, theatres, and similar venues, organizations that may not view their role as primarily educative (Chadwick and Stannett 2000). With many different providers, there are multiple, sometimes competing, purposes for adult arts education. Is it to develop the individual, to maintain the dominant culture, or to change the culture (Elias et al. 1995)? Is it to develop appreciative audiences or creative practitioners (McDaniel and Thorn 1997)? To liberate creativity or to develop technical skills (Milton in Elias et al. 1995)? Is art the means or a goal in itself; that is, are the arts used for instrumental purposes such as critical thinking, literacy, therapy, or other outcomes often used to justify arts education, or does arts learning have intrinsic value (Maguire in Jones et al. 1996)? All of these purposes may have value, if the programs based on them match the goals and motivations of learners.

Issues in Adult Arts Education

These multiple purposes raise certain issues for providers. First, *what counts as art and who decides?* The concept of "High Art" has perpetuated an image of the arts as limited to the art forms and aesthetic values of an elite. Folk art, popular culture, and the like do not meet the standards of the dominant value system (Jones 2000). For many, creative activity ceases after childhood, as "social values, cultural attitudes, and educational practices contribute to a loss of art making experience over a life time" (Jongeward in Jones et al. 1996, p. 116). Mullen's interviews with "ordinary Canadians" (in Elias et al. 1995) acknowledged participants as active members of their culture, creating and transmitting cultural knowledge, yet they often expressed "a sense of inferiority or inadequacy in relation to definitions of 'art' and 'artist'" (p. 254). Maguire (in Jones et al. 1995) argues that too often the art work of people with disabilities is viewed merely as therapy instead of having inherent value.

On the other hand, the Adult Arts Education Project began with the assumptions that every person is endowed with creative impulses and that the arts can play an integral role in everyone's life (McDaniel and Thorn 1997). Defined more broadly, the arts are a means of organizing and making meaning of experience (Lomas 1998); they are "languages for the communication of new ideas" (Milton in Elias et al. 1995, p. 75). To Nolan (in Jones et al. 1996), the function of art is "to destabilise fixed ideas and existing identities; to help us find a new way of seeing, of hearing, of thinking, of feeling.... And to find from those experiences new ways of experiencing our communities, our neighbours, our society" (p. 48).

Based on these definitions, a second issue is *what are the goals of adult arts education?* Adult educators have challenged the limitation of education in the arts to induction into a canon of great art works (Jones 1999). Arts education can help foster identification of and appreciation for cultural heritage (ibid.). However, cultural institutions such as museums can sometimes serve as purveyors of "official" knowledge and culture (Chadwick and Stannett 2000). Rather than a one-way transfer of this knowledge, arts education can play a more dynamic role in developing adults' abilities to analyze, interpret, and produce cultural knowledge (ibid.). For example, adult learners can question dominant cultural representations in museums, asking what is suppressed/forgotten, in whose interest has the selection been made, and whose voices and cultural preferences are portrayed (ibid.).

These activities reflect the social change purposes of adult education. However, learners may have more instrumental goals—such as the acquisition of technical skills and experience to become professional practitioners or teachers (Milton in Elias et al. 1995)—that may clash with providers' goals. Brown and Brownhill (1998), for example, questioned the purpose of art history in a part-time adult degree program: for art appreciation, development of aesthetic judgment, or acquisition of skills? They shaped a course in which art is first contextualized (its time, place, reason for creation, creators, medium), then adults bring their experience to bear on it. The intent was not to produce expert art historians but to develop

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visual and interpretive skills, which are transferable to a critical viewing of the world.

A third issue is *how should learning in the arts be assessed?* According to Jones (2000), assessment in adult visual art classes typically involves an exhibition or portfolio and uses subjective and aesthetic criteria, ignoring the learning that has taken place. Jones also notes that values and standards in the arts change over time. He proposes a model of creative activity in which learners' work is compared to expected learning outcomes such as the development of visual perception, the ability to exploit potential of the medium, involvement in the creative process, and acquisition of relevant knowledge. The focus shifts from outcomes based on content to developmental processes. Using Milton's (in Elias et al. 1995) definition of the arts as languages, the emphasis of assessment "is placed upon the understanding of social and communicative processes ... on the social functions of the artistic language used, rather than on its grammar and vocabulary" (p. 77).

Community Arts and Adult Learning

Community arts is an approach that illustrates the issues of what art is, what the purposes of arts education are, and how arts learning should be assessed. Community arts are focused on the production of art as the expression of community culture, not as a commodity (Williams 2000). Collaborative artistic production is a powerful vehicle for experiential learning and appreciation of other value systems. Community arts have been used by adult, feminist, and popular educators (Clover 2000) and community development and social work practitioners (Williams 2000). They have both instrumental and intrinsic purposes. For example, a Toronto project engaged women in photographic explorations of violence and poverty and the creation of both individual and collective artistic products (Clover 2001). Because art had been viewed "as something that is done only by naturally born talents or those highly trained," the women were empowered by seeing the artistic process as accessible and possible (ibid., p. 5). Community arts projects can also be therapeutic [e.g., a project in which feminist artist-educators used women's crafts as artistic expressions to overcome feelings of isolation and create a sense of community (Clover 2001)] and transformative [e.g., in an environmental adult education project, community members created paintings on Toronto garbage trucks to raise awareness of garbage and the process of waste removal (Clover 2000)].

Community arts address the issue of what counts as art. Lomas (1998) charges that community art is devalued because established traditions, theories, and control of taste, aesthetics, and interpretive skills are in the province of "High Art." She notes that funders more often support arts teaching via technique (content, form, adaptive behavior) rather than authentic experience. Williams (2000) discusses the need to acknowledge community art as an important catalyst for cultural development and outlines suggested outcomes for evaluating the impact of community arts programs, with indicators for each: building social capital, effecting social change, contributing to economic development, recognizing diversity, and defining identity.

Humans are impelled to interpret and make meaning of experiences. Moreover, "adults will eagerly engage in learning and growing and will participate when meaningful opportunities and conditions are presented" (McDaniel and Thorn 1997, pp. 67-68). Adults may find a rich source of meaningful learning opportunities in and through the arts. Education *in* the arts includes activities whose primary purpose is to encourage people to engage with the arts as creators, participants, or appreciators (Jones 1999). Education *through* the arts involves activities that use the arts to achieve ends that are tangential to the arts (ibid.), developing new ways of seeing, knowing, and experiencing. "The different spaces in which these activities take place embody different value systems. Maybe it is time to reconsider what we mean by the arts and by creativity" (p. 7).

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This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under Contract No. ED-99-CO-0013. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. ***Digests*** may be freely reproduced and are available at <http://ericacve.org/digests.asp>.

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